

Day surgery and anaesthesia

Day surgery is surgery that is completed in one day, and does not require the patient to stay in hospital overnight. Generally, you have to arrive several hours before your operation is scheduled.

Once you have checked in at the registration desk, you are taken to the day surgery area and asked to fill in various forms that include information about insurance, emergency contacts and so on. You may also need to read and sign a written request and consent for the surgery if this has not been completed previously. Then you will change into a hospital gown.

Medical issues to consider

After settling into the day surgery section of the hospital, you will be checked by a nurse (this may include recording your pulse, blood pressure, weight and temperature). Usually your anaesthetist will visit you. They may examine you, review your health history questionnaire and ask you more questions. For example, they may ask:

- How have you responded to previous anaesthesia and operations?
- Have there been any anaesthetic problems in any member of your family?
- What medicines or tablets are you taking?
- Do you have any allergies or sensitivities?
- What are your past and present medical problems?
- What are your smoking and drinking habits?
- Have you had dental work?
- Do you ever have indigestion or reflux?

Several hours before the operation

There are several things that you should be aware of and that may happen before you go into surgery including:

- **Tests** – you may have a physical examination. Your anaesthetist may order additional tests to supplement those performed on your first visit to day surgery.
- **Fasting** – if there is food or drink in your stomach during and immediately after the anaesthetic, it can be very dangerous. This is why you should not eat or drink anything for several hours before your anaesthetic. (You will be advised how long you should fast by the nursing staff. Usually, at least six hours without food is recommended.)
- **Anaesthesia** – your anaesthetist will discuss the appropriate anaesthetic. Sometimes, the anaesthetist arranges for a sedative to be given an hour or so before the operation. This pre-medication will help you feel drowsy and relaxed. You can discuss whether you need this with the anaesthetist.
- **Safety** – you may be asked to remove any false teeth and jewellery.

Before the operation

Immediately before the operation, you will be taken to the anaesthetic room or operating room to have the anaesthetic. The type of anaesthetic depends on the type of surgery, your health and, to some extent, your preference. It may include:

- **General anaesthesia** – in the operating theatre, your anaesthetist administers the general anaesthetic (usually with an injection into a vein in the back of the hand) to render you unconscious. Remember, your anaesthetist will be dressed in theatre uniform and not ordinary clothes, so they may be hard to recognise. Your anaesthetist is responsible for constantly watching over your breathing, pulse and blood pressure during your operation. The type and length of operation you have may mean you have an intravenous drip inserted while you are still under the anaesthetic.

- **Regional anaesthesia** – local anaesthetic is injected into either the epidural space or the spinal fluid. If you have a spinal anaesthetic, you will feel numb from the injection point down. You will not be able to move your legs. If you have an epidural, you will have a band of numbness at the surgical site and your legs may also feel weak. This regional effect is temporary. The numbness and weakness wear off over a few hours with both epidural and spinal anaesthesia. You may be awake and alert or receive light sedation. You will be pain free.
- **Local anaesthesia** – is generally reserved for small and simple procedures. For example, you may have an injection of local anaesthetic into the skin around a cut before it is stitched. Only the immediate area surrounding the injection is numbed.

The operation

The operation is done, as discussed and agreed between you and the surgeon.

Immediately after the operation

After your operation is over, you are taken to the recovery room. This is a special area, close to the operating theatre and staffed by nurses trained to look after patients who are waking up following an anaesthetic. Because of the drugs you have been given, you may remember little of this time and your first recollection after the operation may be of your day surgery bed.

If you were given a local anaesthetic for a small procedure, you are discharged shortly after your surgery. Sometimes, you may stay in the day surgery for one or two hours after leaving the recovery room. It is strongly recommended that you have a friend or relative drive you home. If this is not possible, you may be able to catch a taxi.

Side effects and possible complications

Some of the side effects and possible complications of anaesthesia include:

- Drowsiness
- Sore throat
- Nausea
- Dizziness
- Blurred vision
- Short term memory loss
- Bleeding at the injection site
- Infection at the injection site
- Low blood pressure
- Headache
- Temporary nerve damage
- Kidney failure
- Liver failure
- Allergic reaction to the anaesthetic
- Seizure
- Muscle aches
- Dental injury.

Taking care of yourself at home

If you have been given sedatives, pain relievers or general anaesthesia, you may feel drowsy after the procedure. This is because a small amount of the anaesthetic may still remain in your body; this can slow your reaction time and affect your judgement for the next 24 hours. During this time, you should not drive a car, operate potentially dangerous machinery, drink alcohol, sign any important documents or care for young children without other adult help. Be guided by your doctor and anaesthetist, but other general suggestions to help you take care of yourself at home include:

- Your anaesthetist and surgeon decide together whether you need pain relievers to take home if they expect some postoperative pain or discomfort after your discharge. Take medications strictly as directed; do not exceed the recommended doses.
- You must assume responsibility for your own after-surgery care, as you will not be staying in the hospital overnight. Ask your surgeon or doctor for specific instructions.
- If you have any concerns, contact your doctor or surgeon.

Long term outlook

Serious complications from anaesthesia are very rare. Generally, anaesthetics are considered to be safe with no long term side effects.

Other forms of treatment

Some alternatives to injected anaesthetic could include:

- Anaesthetic cream can be rubbed into the skin for small surgical procedures.
- Acupuncture has been found to help manage pain.
- Transcutaneous electrical nerve stimulation (TENS) therapy involves passing a minute electrical current through the skin, prompting a pain-killing response from the body.

Where to get help

- Your local doctor
- Anaesthetist
- Surgeon

Things to remember

- Day surgery is surgery that is completed in one day, and does not require the patient to be hospitalised overnight.
- The presence of food or drink in the stomach is dangerous, both during and immediately after the anaesthetic.
- Serious complications from anaesthesia are very rare.

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Australian Society of Anaesthetists Ltd

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